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Newsli

The magazine for the Association of Sign Language Interpreters in the United Kingdom

Ready? Recorded assignments

VIDEO

- The LGBTQ+ interpreter
- Interpreting in Jewish settings
- Pandemic training placements

ASLI
Association of Sign Language Interpreters

Letter from the Editor

Many aspects of our lives have changed immeasurably since March 2020, and the working lives of many SLIs are no exception. In our cover story (page 8), Sharan Thind looks at the proliferation of requests to record interpretations, at the widespread uncertainty in weighing up whether to agree and at how sign language interpreters can take a confident and proactive part in these conversations.

Max Marchewicz (page 18) reflects on being an LGBTQ+ sign language interpreter, tackling heteronormative assumptions in BSL and why remote working has made it easier than ever to find the best interpreter. Turn to page 22 for Vicki Ashmore's account of being a Jewish interpreter, the potential pitfalls of Jewish settings and why she's intent on challenging hatred when she sees it.

On page 26, Megan McArthur gives a research-based outline of how GDPR has left deaf BSL users disadvantaged when they contact banks by phone via third-party professionals, while Jules Dickinson, Jill Henshaw and Brett Best provide an early taster (page 6) of recent research into imposter syndrome in the profession.

On page 15, we hear from two trainees in conversation about the merits of a programme combining online and face-to-face placements and, on page 4, outgoing chair Jill Henshaw reflects on the Association's gains during the pandemic. Ray Greene, on page 20, describes the set up of an Irish Register for SLIs and page 17 provides a recap on ASLI recent events around the country.

ZOE CACANAS
Editor

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Deadline for articles in the October issue of Newsli: 1 September. There is no guarantee that your article will make the next issue. Please give the editor as much notice as possible. Send articles, letters or feature ideas to newsli@asli.org.uk.

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RAY GREENE qualified as an ISL/English Interpreter in 2004. She is a board member of the Council of Irish Sign Language Interpreters (CISLI) and has recently registered on the Directory of Interpreters with RISLI and been accepted on their mentorship programme.

MILES HARRIS is a University of Wolverhampton student and freelance TSLI. He works primarily in the educational and community domains and has been involved with ASLI's Equality and Diversity Policy. Outside of interpreting, he enjoys knitting and running a game called Pathfinder.

MAX MARCHEWICZ is an RSLI based in the East Midlands. They started interpreter training in 2013 and, delayed by the inaccessibility and inflexibility of their original training provider, finally became fully qualified in 2020. They are the founder of Notts LGBTQ+ Disabled+ Forum and also provide access consultancy and training on disability, LGBTQ+ and trans awareness.

CHELSEA POWELL is a final year interpreting student at the University of Wolverhampton. A newly qualified TSLI, she is keen to explore the medical and media domains and will soon start an in-house SLI role with a West Midlands-based agency. She is also a National League volleyball player.

SHARAN THIND qualified as a RSLI in 2014. Currently based in London, working remotely as well as face-to-face, she has recently started exploring attitudes to recording assignments. Sharan doesn't order her main dish in a restaurant until she's seen the dessert menu.

DEBBIE WATKINS is a qualified SLI who specialises in mental health and VRI and has a passion for deafblind work. Deb loves a travel interpreting trip and has seen the globe, from Russia to the Amalfi Coast to Poland and Skegness and back again. She spends most of her time drying the coat and ears of a springer spaniel.

Note from the Board

Outgoing Chair **Jill Henshaw** welcomes the proliferation of supportive networks and relationships during the pandemic and invites you to help keep ASLI growing and thriving

Now, in the throes of summer and with a return to face-to-face work for some of us, it could be easy to forget what the last tumultuous 18 months have been like. So much has happened and I doubt that, if we are honest, we have allowed ourselves the time and space to process the impact of the pandemic, its restrictions and our individual experiences, as well as those of loved ones and its collective effects on us all.

As a profession we have been hit – emotionally, mentally and in some cases physically – as have the communities we work with. We are at a strange crossroads where, with trepidation, we re-enter society, head back to offices, attend long-awaited appointments, deal with the consequences of delayed treatments and mix with those for whom life has continued much the same. We are also seeing changes occurring in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, subsequent protests and calls for change. We are watching footballers take the knee and responses by uncomfortable fans and MPs who are unable to fathom the importance of such a stance. It feels like change is in the air.

One of the outcomes of the pandemic for many of us has been a re-evaluation of what is most important to us, how we wish to spend our time and who we wish to spend it with. As an Association we have seen a lot of supportive networks set up and relationships fostered to see one another through this difficult period. We have had input and support from various Members to provide us with valuable knowledge and expertise, such as the Equality and Diversity Working Group, the Trainee Support Group and the Newsli Editorial Advisory Group, as well as Regions providing a range of training and networking opportunities, coffee mornings, quizzes, pub nights and more.

Growing, adapting, listening

I have been incredibly proud to be a part of ASLI as an ordinary Member, a Regional contact for the East Midlands and director of the Board, seeing the incredible work that has been done to provide an Association that grows, adapts and listens to its Members. I have been volunteering for ASLI for six years and it has been a fantastic experience, giving me great insight into the profession, the Association and our Members and I am delighted to see us grow to over 1,000 Members this year.

'The role of director is not about interpreting skills or how long you have been qualified'

The last 18 months have been somewhat different to my first two years on the Board, and the move to everything being online has not been easy, as many of you will know. However, we have done a lot of good work in exceedingly difficult times. I am immensely proud of the projects I have been involved with on behalf of ASLI, from liaising with Regions to organising consultation days, liaising with DIN, getting the Census up and running, setting up the new mentoring training course, to name a few. It has been a great six years and I have shared lots of fun, laughter and happy memories with many Members at consultation days, conferences and other events.

I have decided not to stand for re-election in October. I currently have other commitments that require my focus, mainly the master's degree that I started in January, but I would consider returning to a formal position in the future. I am happy to continue to support ASLI's work and will be around for the Board to call upon, as were previous chairs for me, and I look forward to seeing how our Association develops.

ASLI is healthy and vibrant and it has weathered the storm of the last 18 months very well. However, we need more Members to take on roles, large or small, to play a part in continuing ASLI's success. What is important to you? Is ASLI something you can offer some time to?

The AGM paperwork will be online this month (July), when we will be looking for nominations for future directors of the Board. ASLI needs people to join the team to continue to provide new ideas, renewed energy and different perspectives. The workload has increased and will continue to do so as we grow.

We are currently looking at making some changes so that the Board is less executive and therefore directors will not need to spend so much time on tasks; they will have a greater governance role.

'As ASLI adapts, it would be wonderful to know Members always feel represented'

Helping the bigger wheel to turn

The role of director is not about interpreting skills or how long you have been qualified but about being able to contribute some time, offer opinions, make decisions or use organisational skills or any other transferrable skills you may have to help the bigger wheel to turn.

We would love to see greater diversity of Board Members in each iteration too, as this always generates different perspectives and decisions and, as ASLI adapts, it would be wonderful to know Members always feel represented. If anyone is considering joining the Board, we would be more than happy to talk to you in more detail. This position is open to all Members who have been an ASLI Member for 12 months or more.

ASLI has always been a great support and I have been happy to give back. Still, for now, it is someone else's turn. You will be in safe hands with the current Board members and I have no doubt that, between them and the office, ASLI will continue to grow from strength to strength.

I would like to thank all the Board members I have worked with for all their work and support over the years, as well as Members I have had contact with, the office staff who do great work for us, Zoe for her work editing *Newsli*, Noel for his input as our accountant, and I wish the future Board members and ASLI representatives the greatest success. Enjoy the ride!

‘You are not alone’



Research earlier this year revealed that imposter syndrome is an issue that resonates in our profession, report the survey’s creators and ‘recovering’ imposters **Jules Dickinson**, **Brett Best** and **Jill Henshaw**

‘Imposter Syndrome’ is a term being more freely bandied about of late. Perhaps not quite yet reaching the status of a buzz term, it is nevertheless increasingly being mentioned on social media, blog posts and during informal conversations. This growing use seemingly indicates that it’s a phenomenon to which many people can relate. But what do we know about how Imposter Syndrome manifests in our profession?

In February, the three of us shared what we thought would be a small survey to try and gauge if Imposter Syndrome is prevalent within the interpreting and translation field. We had an inkling it might be – all three of us would confess to being ‘recovering’ imposters, something we each found difficult to believe about each other.

Outside of our own experience of Imposter Syndrome, we all have an interest in the topic. For Jules, Imposter Syndrome is often mentioned within the supervisory relationship. It is also an element of her work on shame and shame resilience. From previous research that Brett undertook with Rachel Wilkins on horizontal violence, she suspected that Imposter Syndrome might present after certain types of experiences with certain colleagues. Jill has spoken with many practitioners who have struggled with Imposter Syndrome, some of whom have been her students, and therefore ways to overcome it were of interest to pass on to others. A search through the relevant literature revealed no empirical evidence published to date specific to the field of interpreting and translation research and so, after some initial discussions in October 2019, we thought we should set about gathering some data.

‘This is a phenomenon that we need to take seriously’

You may have seen the survey. If you did, and you responded, we thank you. Our ‘small’ survey garnered a total of 339 responses and to say we were surprised and overwhelmed is an understatement. The number of responses and the raw, moving and distressing experiences shared by survey participants demonstrates that it is clearly a topic that resonates in our field.

‘The most important finding is that feelings of self-doubt and anxiety are very prevalent in our industry’

The most obvious and perhaps most important finding from the survey responses is that feelings of self-doubt and anxiety are very prevalent in our industry. So, if you experience these feelings – or if you ever have – the first message we want to share is that you most certainly are not alone. The sheer number of responses is testament to this. Of course, we acknowledge that people who can relate to the topic of inquiry are more likely to respond to a survey; regardless, the number of people who responded (with most indicating that they felt they are experiencing or had experienced Imposter Syndrome to some degree during their career) shows that this is a phenomenon that our field needs to take seriously.

The impact of IS on our practice

As we stated earlier, the review of the literature shows that we know surprisingly little about whether interpreters, translators and other communication professionals experience Imposter Syndrome. There is minimal empirical data about how many individuals feel they either have it or have experienced it in the past.

When we created the survey, we spent a lot of time mulling over what we wanted to ask people. We sought to explore the internal and unspoken struggles of those individuals who felt the concept resonated with them. We felt it would be useful to know whether Imposter Syndrome changes over time. We wanted to know if routes to qualification have an influence and whether experiences are broadly similar or differ depending on the individual. Finally, we felt it was important to try and identify the types of coping strategies people might use to mitigate their feelings of imposterism.

We look forward to adding to our understanding of how Imposter Syndrome impacts on professional practice. While further research will be needed into this topic, we are keen to know if identifying Imposter Syndrome will be important to our profession, particularly in relation to its impact on an individual’s practice and therefore potentially on the service that we provide.

‘The first way that we, both as individual practitioners and as a profession, can begin to address the issue is by exposing it to the air’

We are still at an early stage of analysing, number crunching and theming the responses to the survey. All three of us are researching this topic due to personal interest and any work must be done alongside other professional and personal demands. We intend to write at least one article – potentially more due to the volume of data – and we want this to be open access so it can be of use to practitioners. We hope that others will go on to build on our work.

We are eager to disseminate and share our findings. The first way that we, both as individual practitioners and as a profession, can begin to address the issue is by talking about it, exposing it to the air. Open and frank discussions about how we feel about the work we do will bring the issue to the surface and enable a healthy examination of what is really happening.

We hope that an empirical study into the phenomenon of Imposter Syndrome in our field will serve as a catalyst for the discussion that will help ease the stigma associated with those feelings of self-doubt that so many of us evidently experience. Watch this space!

Press reset

With recording requests ever more prevalent, SLIs need to apply theoretical models at the core of their training in order to confidently determine whether they will accept. **Sharan Thind** reports

The growth in requests to record interpreting assignments since the first lockdown in 2020 has revealed the unprecedented level of exposure that SLIs are facing within their everyday practice, as well as highlighting gaps in our professional learning. To better understand how colleagues were responding to these new ways of working, I needed to determine what it would take to make them feel more confident with the decisions they faced when asked to be recorded.

An initial study in March this year highlighted the many concerns language professionals faced when asked whether they were happy to consent to their work being recorded. The survey of 110 sign language interpreters and translators (spanning both registered and trainees) highlighted the following:

- ▲ 87% of respondents had seen an increase in assignments being recorded
- ▲ Over 70% of all respondents were uncomfortable saying no when put on the spot before an assignment
- ▲ 85% of the respondents currently accepting recorded work found it difficult to say no when asked on the spot
- ▲ 70% of respondents wanted a toolkit for approaching assignments being recorded.

Having completed my preliminary research, I concluded that to maintain professional confidence in situations where our work is being recorded, we need to further develop our preparatory knowledge within the context of online working. We also need to create and implement a toolkit to aid our decision-making process, a proposal that was universally welcomed by participants.

If interpreters can pinpoint why they do not want to be recorded, and therefore refuse recorded assignments, they can confidently create a narrative to support their decisions and take steps to develop their skillset in that area. The intended outcome of a toolkit is a decision-making process that can be adapted to support SLIs generally in assessing their own confidence levels based on skillset, understanding and experience.

Confidence as core

Following my initial survey, I facilitated two independent workshops to further explore the primary themes of confidence and navigate conversations on being recorded. The workshops, which took place on 5 and 19 May, involved 31 participants across two groups. The overarching theme of confidence was relevant to many people's perceptions of recorded work, whether related to target language produced for a real-time audience that would be viewed later, judgement from peers or struggling to say no without coming across as unreasonable. Workshop participants said they needed *'to hook into strategies of addressing this beforehand and on the spot',* as well as wanting to *'have more confidence to approach the topic'.*

I had the sense that interpreters were forgetting, or not applying, the theoretical models that lie at the core of our training. This led to them not asking the right questions pre-assignment, which could otherwise help to address any issues around recording prior to the assignment.

Kay and Shipman (2014) define confidence as *'hard to define but easy to recognise. With it, you can take on the world; without it, you live stuck at the starting block of your potential'*. I believe that each interpreter has the capacity to develop the appropriate skillset to enable them to agree confidently and clearly to being recorded. However, we need to first understand their initial hesitation.

There is little research on confidence within the profession; it is difficult to measure and is subjectively based on an individual's lived experience, personality and overall understanding of a situation. Christina Woods, a postgraduate interpreting student from Wisconsin, brought to light Patricia Benner's (1982) nursing theory, discussing the development of expertise (Woods, 2019) and applying it to confidence in new interpreters. It was noted that Benner's work revealed that, 'as nurses advance in experience and education, they become more proficient and competent in clinical situations, passing through five levels of nursing proficiency: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert' (Messmer, Jones, and Taylor, cited in Woods, 2019). Woods also highlights that 'skill and understanding build from a strong educational foundation and continue to grow with experience.'

'The overarching theme of confidence was relevant to many people's perceptions of recorded work'

Even experienced interpreters can lack confidence

There is no correlation between experience and being confident with recorded assignments (Thind, 2021). In fact, participants who were qualified for a longer period felt *'pressure to have the answers to issues surrounding recorded work'.*

We need to step away from a narrative that equates interpreter experience with the number of years qualified and instead move towards an understanding of experience founded on continued learning, upskilling and application. One workshop participant stated that '*working online and being recorded is a domain in itself*'. Interpreters move between different environments, clients (deaf, hearing etc) and language audiences daily. This results in them having different levels of exposure and confidence in these different environments.

Benner's theory of expertise can be adapted and applied to most domains interpreters encounter and it can also be used as a 'confidence barometer' for decision-making, underpinned by other models we should already be using to help prepare for recorded assignments. This multi-theory approach thereby creates a 'system of layering'. The goal is to have each interpreter at the expert level, with the ability to confidently consent to recorded assignments, if they wish to do so. If they choose not to, they can then provide alternatives and troubleshoot when something is not suitable for recording. Alongside this, the competence to take other participants on a journey to fully explain what is expected from a recorded assignment should be developed.

Recorded assignments and the four Ps

My research has made me intrigued as to how we as interpreters approach our work – our client base, workload and process of accepting assignments. Working from a sociolinguistic model of interpreting, Napier et al (2006) explains that 'we are now looking at having the capacity to incorporate ourselves as participants into the interpretation process. We have an influence on any interaction that takes place'. In an online environment, where things are vastly different to face-to-face settings, we have no choice but to see ourselves as active participants.

Working online requires interpreters to ask more questions about the assignments they accept, but the research findings suggest that this is not happening. One participant wanted *'to gain some nuanced thinking and clarity'*; however, clarity can only come from understanding all the details of an assignment, irrespective of it being recorded. So, recording our interpretation is not the real issue – everything up until that point is. This is where the four Ps (Eighinger and Karlin, 2003, cited in Napier et al, 2006) come into effect – Place, Participants, Purpose, Point. These could be considered the foundation of understanding any assignment.

PARTICIPANTS: **Who** is the target audience? Do the participants in this assignment have the same/different objectives?

PLACE: **Where** is this assignment happening in real time? Will there be a present/future audience? Outputs? (This is where interpreters raise the question of recording.)

PURPOSE: **Why** is this assignment taking place? Is it to inform people or make profit from the information being interpreted? Is this an isolated event/one of many? (This is where you can raise and consider quoted fees, if necessary.)

POINT: **What** does the assignment need to achieve? (This enables the interpreter to gauge whether they can actively participate to achieve the goal of this assignment.)

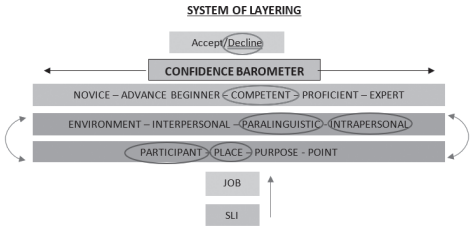
Once an assignment's four Ps are established, the SLI is more informed about whether they would like to accept or decline the booking. They are also able to determine at which point in the decision-making process (ie, at which 'P') they changed their mind.

The following example further exemplifies how this process works in the context of recorded assignments: *An interpreter has been working with the same client for five years and is asked on one occasion to interpret a workshop for the client that will later be viewed over the next month by four other deaf colleagues who work for the same organisation. The interpreter realises the four Ps are now starting to look quite different to how they normally appear with this client, and the interpreter is no longer comfortable with their interpretation being viewed later by different audiences. The interpreter declines the assignment.*

Theoretical layering

Here, the Purpose and Point have not changed; only the Participants and Place have. The interpreter has declined on the basis of possible or perceived judgement by a future target audience (intrapersonal demands) and language used during their interpretation (paralinguistic demand) (Dean and Pollard, 2007, cited in Napier, 2006). The process of theoretical layering is demonstrated by Dean and Pollard's Demand-Control Schema (2013), through the application of the EIPI taxonomy (see figure below). At this point we can also better identify where an individual's confidence begins to shift, based on experience and the possible demands faced by the interpreter. This interpreter on any other day may have permissioned themselves, on Benner's scale of expertise, as either proficient or expert. However, when asked to be recorded, allowing their work to be accessed by a wider future audience, there is hesitancy. As a result, we are left questioning what fundamental skill or piece of knowledge is missing which ultimately influences the interpreter's decision to refuse the recorded assignment?

'Clarity can only come from understanding all the details of an assignment, irrespective of it being recorded'



The four Ps and the elements that make up EIPI need to function together as the main core of any assignment in order for the sign language interpreter to feel confident, especially when being recorded. When any part of this core that highlights their experience level is missing, it reveals their level of confidence.

Continuing with the example above, firstly, the sign language interpreter identified that their output would need to cater to a wider audience. This means they would have to consider appropriate use of language and standardisation of some BSL vocabulary, which they may not be used to. An example would be if for the past five years the above interpreter has been using the sign for 'TRIGGER' (strong emotional reaction set off by a set of words or image that reminds a person of a traumatic event) as the sign for 'GUN'. That sign may be contextually appropriate for use between the interpreter and their regular client, but otherwise inappropriate, or inaccurately perceived during a recorded assignment for a wider audience.

'A disclaimer, attached to a recorded assignment, is sometimes necessary to safeguard an interpretation'

Secondly, to better understand their fear of judgement from others, the interpreter could engage in supervision. Interpreters can use the model above for professional development, before and during recorded assignments, to better understand themselves, as well as navigating what they need and communicating what those needs are. Interpreters should use the consideration of recorded work as an opportunity to monitor and regulate their output, develop their knowledge and progress their career. In support of this, 76% of my respondents acknowledge the benefits of having their work recorded for professional development purposes (Thind, 2021).

This model of layering is still a work in progress and will be further shaped by ongoing dialogue and workshops. One workshop participant wanted to understand the issues surrounding recorded work as *'this topic wasn't covered much in interpreting training'*, something that I agree with. However, we were trained to understand each part of our assignment. I have never felt more strongly that interpreters need to be proactive in ascertaining the four Ps before accepting the booking.

Disclaimers

It is important to state that some participants are happy to be recorded and already seem to be navigating this changing landscape. Still, a disclaimer, attached to a recorded assignment,

is sometimes necessary to safeguard their interpretation. The popular 'one liners' are the hardest to create, as our interpreting journeys are subjective, but creating the disclaimer for people to take away and adapt according to their own narrative reassured some workshop participants. A speech to text reporter helped in this. Variations of the following could be used: *'The interpretation of this content was recorded live and may contain errors due to the live nature of the content, speakers and prep materials provided. Please keep this in mind when watching.'*

SLIs need to think about the conversations they have with those booking them and start pre-empting problems by asking at the outset whether it will be recorded. An unprecedented recording request may occur even in a regular assignment which has never previously been recorded. Initiating the conversation about recording allows the interpreter to clarify what the four Ps may look like and as a result they can choose whether to proceed with the assignment or not.

Working remotely has been beneficial for individuals to gain access to information after real-time events. We should create shadowing opportunities to start building confidence in this area. If we want to be seen as professional, active participants, we need to start behaving like it.

'The systems that enable us to work remotely need to be navigated with confidence, as do our conversations around being recorded'

Our professional landscape has changed dramatically in such a short period of time, but to grow as a profession we must adapt to a new way of working. The systems that enable us to work remotely need to be navigated with confidence, as do the conversations around our work being recorded. This article is an introduction to my research at its most formative stage, but there is much room for further discussion and exploration around the increasing prevalence of recorded assignments and on issues of confidence. Through the application of theory and a process of layering, I hope we can learn to accommodate these demands through appropriate self-reflection and self-actualisation.

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'Five minutes into the workshop I felt relieved. It wasn't just me'

Debbie Watkins reports from Sharan Thind's workshop on the 'hot potato' of recorded assignments

Even before the pandemic sent everyone to the comfort of their own pets, I was already aware of how easy it was for participants to record my work. With the 2020 lockdown, we were all suddenly remote. I often wondered if people were secretly taking recordings of me happily engrossed in my interpreting work. I found myself thinking more about this – why it would happen. Was it curiosity from hearing participants? Was it the deaf person double-checking the accuracy of my BSL-ENG interpretation? Would they quality-check the level of interpretation with a hearing counterpart, after the event?

My already complex job had become more intricate. While I was trying to navigate all these changes, I was asked if it would be OK if an upcoming remote assignment could be recorded. Honestly, it felt as if someone had fired at me, at close range, with a slingshot. My stomach churned and I had horrible feelings of unease. I declined and the hearing client agreed and that was the end of the conversation. To my relief, the client never asked me why I had refused, as I honestly do not know what I would have said.

The topic of being recorded soon became a hot potato, as people batted the idea around.

'Was it just the recording element that had jolted us into this heightened state of fear?

Having these conversations felt like doing cartwheels in treacle. I just could not get my head around what to say and why I was uneasy.

I had heard that Sharan was looking into this monster that needed addressing – online work and the recording of interpreters – and attended her workshop on 19 May.

Who are we anyway?

Sharan, an expert host, asked us to really consider what sort of person we each were and how our personality and frame of reference made us choose the types of jobs we accept. Are we hot-seat multi-domain creatures, diving from job to job with volcanic interpreting demands in a variety of settings? Or are we more 'Steady Eddie' with familiar clients and regular safe-space domains? We were asked whether we liked being recorded and the consensus was a big fat no. Five minutes into the workshop I felt relieved. It wasn't just me.

We were expertly taken on a journey by Sharan, exploring more deeply the reasons we felt confident or otherwise at work. What made us avoid certain bookings and drew us to others? Was it just the recording element that had jolted us into this heightened state of fear? Sharan gently suggested it was a good time for us, as SLIs, to start looking both more inwardly and outwardly when we think about our work.

We were introduced to Patricia Benner's model, 'From Novice to Expert', and were asked to picture ourselves in a job setting where we felt

we were up in the 'expert' end of the scale. We had to picture a job that we had completed many times before, over many years, and then imagine that we were asked to be recorded for that very same job. Sharan asked us to consider why we were so reluctant to say yes to the recording. Why was our gut reaction to say no, or to 'whack a £100 on top'?

Was it:

- ▲ fear of scrutiny?
- ▲ loss of control?
- ▲ fear of criticism?
- ▲ not being paid enough to be filmed?
- ▲ not having any rights?
- ▲ the worry that it would go viral?
- ▲ the fact we don't know the deaf person and/or SLIs who would be viewing the interpretation at a later date?
- ▲ anxiety around the target language/unknown regional variations?
- ▲ anxiety about errors occurring due to a lack of prep?

These are the reasons factored into why we decline to be recorded. So how would we reduce or eliminate these? Our resounding answer was a toolkit. We wanted language we could use in these conversations and confidence in knowing what to ask for before saying yes, but the answers had to come from us, as we are all different interpreters. For some reason, we had all forgotten that we can clearly state our needs. We can be concise and friendly and all those nice things we often are. We were shown how we could ensure we had all of our four Ps in place (who, what, where, why) and understand the different aims of all of the participants involved.

We were asked to go one step further to look at another concept, which would help us unpack all these feelings and was referred to by Sharan as a 'system of layering.' Having the four Ps, alongside a grasp of the Demand/Control EIPI (environment, interpersonal, paralinguistic, intrapersonal) would surely make us feel happier to do the job.

'Sharan asked us to consider why we were so reluctant to say yes to the recording'

Finally, we looked at disclaimers. Sharan shared some excellent examples of phrases and paragraphs we could tweak for future use. Either way, we all seemed happy with our newfound confidence.

The very next day, I was offered a job to interpret for some upcoming interviews for a research company. These would be on Zoom and would be recorded. I can't tell you how confident I felt setting out my questions and the reasons why I needed to know this information. I was able to initiate a useful conversation around the style of the interviews and the required length, format and tone. The individual conducting the interviews and I both gained an insight into each other's work that we may not have otherwise had. I sent over my disclaimer paragraph and had an email straight back with full agreement that it would be added to each recording.

Below is the disclaimer I used. Please feel free to adapt: *'The interpretation of these conversations was recorded during a live interaction and may contain errors due to the nature of the content and/or speakers being unknown to participants. The intention is always to provide a true and accurate interpretation and is tailored purely to the needs of the people present. Please bear this in mind when watching the videos.'*

Sharan asked us if we felt we had been through a bit of self-discovery and I can honestly say that I truly feel like I hit the reset button and it worked. △

'The dynamic in each is really different'

Trainees **Chelsea Powell** and **Miles Harris** compare their experiences of a combined online and face-to-face placement offering

Chelsea Powell and Miles Harris, third-year students on the University of Wolverhampton's BA (Hons) Interpreting BSL/English degree and TSLIs, undertook a nine-week placement between January and March this year as part of the 6I009 module. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, this took place both face-to-face and through online platforms.

Miles: So Chelsea, where was your placement?

Chelsea: My placement took place with a freelance sign language interpreter in the media domain, which wasn't an area of work that I had previously considered. After the nine-week placement, I think it is definitely a domain I would like to work in. How about you?

M: I was mostly in education, but I was the same as you – it wasn't an area I'd considered, but once I was there, I realised I quite liked it.

'The SLI assisted the deaf director when matching the music to a shot change and ensuring the mood matched'

C: That's a brilliant thing about placement; it allows you to observe sign language interpreters and find out if this is a domain you would like to work in. It was intriguing to see the different roles the SLIs had. For example, a deaf director was in the post-production stage of a TV programme and the SLI assisted when matching the music to a shot change and ensuring the 'mood' matched. That wasn't the typical interpreter role I expected.

M: I had also thought the role of interpreters was quite rigid, and it's not. It can be really versatile and can go in all sorts of directions. It was good to properly experience the profession and network and ask questions. Now I know that I've got people to talk to.

C: I agree with you; the placement isn't only a learning opportunity but also a chance to start building our support networks and get to know others within the profession. For me, being online didn't affect this too much. As webinars, workshops and CPD are now being held online, we have also had the opportunity to connect with people both inside and outside of our local regions, which is always a bonus.

M: Yeah, for me being online has made some

things more accessible, and I've been able to connect with people that I wouldn't have ordinarily. I've also seen interpretations that wouldn't have happened due to distance, which I found useful, especially from an online working perspective.

C: The fact that we only have to open our laptops and click a link to enter a meeting or attend a conference definitely has its positives. However, I think we have to be careful about the amount of screen time and its potential impact on our health.

M: You really have to strike that balance between taking the jobs and considering your health, especially being sat in front of a screen, potentially all day. So for you, what was the most significant difference being online as opposed to face-to-face?

C: The assignments I observed online and face-to-face were different, so I can't make a direct comparison. However, I did feel that, when face-to-face, I could understand the workplace and the interpreter's role within it in more depth because I was physically present in that environment. It made me realise how we take the information from the environment and use this to inform interpreting decisions. Online you don't have that luxury. What was your experience?

M: The dynamic in each is really different. Online, there was a link, you turned up, worked, then left. Face-to-face, the sign language interpreters were used more because they were there and available. There was more human interaction. Also, seeing co-working in person and remotely was interesting, because online I saw half of the team, whereas face-to-face, I saw the preparation and coping strategies. It was interesting to see how a job translates from online to in-person, so I'm a bit more confident about both now.

C: Yeah, I'm definitely glad we have been able to experience both. I was quite lucky, as when I observed an assignment that required co-working, my placement supervisor would set up a Zoom meeting with the other sign language interpreter beforehand. This allowed me to observe their pre-assignment discussions. It was good as it kept it as close to the face-to-face experience as possible.

'Online I saw half of the team, whereas face-to-face, I saw the preparation and strategies'

M: Definitely an interesting time to be a trainee sign language interpreter and a student, as we see everything changing with Covid guidelines. I'm so glad that we all managed to undertake placement and learn what we needed to, especially with a multifaceted approach of online and face-to-face.

Last question – what do you think you've learned that you will be able to apply in the future?

C: More than anything else, I'd say have confidence in myself and go for it – if I have an opportunity, I need to take it. While on placement, I took the opportunity given to me by my placement supervisor to interpret for a deaf make-up artist on the set of a drama production. This was my first time interpreting after gaining my TSLI status, so I was fairly nervous. However, I am so glad I took the opportunity because it was such a beneficial experience.

M: That's definitely a key takeaway – you just have to go for it and be confident. You've got where you are because of the hard work you put in, and you've got the support of your supervisor. Taking those chances is the first step to getting the ball rolling and feeling more confident.

C: Exactly, we've just got to go for it. Better to take the opportunity than to miss it.

Around the Regions

Find out what's been going on in ASLI's Regions

Mid South Coast

In April, MSC held our usual bi-monthly gathering, where Members brought their concerns and thoughts about working during the pandemic and post-pandemic. On 12 June, MSC Members attended Sharan Thind's 'Lets talk about confidence and navigating conversations around being recorded'. This workshop is incredibly helpful for any sign language interpreters feeling uncertain around how to respond in such situations and offers helpful wording for terms and conditions. At our June meeting, we welcomed new Members, Kat Wiltshire and Anna Bolton.

Colette Phippard

East Midlands

On 25 May, we had NRCPD presenting a virtual question and answer session as a follow-up to Colette Phippard's previous presentation on the new NRCPD CPD logging requirements. A two-part presentation on Demand-Control Schema was presented virtually by Robyn Dean on 15 May and 12 June. We plan to hold reading groups/ fuddles and an Unconscious Bias training session later in the year.

Sam Dowsett and John Emery

West Midlands

West Midlands Region drew our much-loved webinar series 'West Midlands Presents…' to a close with a session from Jason Bell on Fiduciary Duties for Interpreters (14 May). We have recently welcomed Dr Sally Austen (12 June) to our Region to deliver some excellent training and have run an informal event for new parents returning to work as interpreters.

Most excitingly, we held our first IRL social event with a chat in Cannon Hill Park and a trip to the cinema to see the excellent Sound of Metal (13 June). It was so lovely to see Members, old and new. We look forward to our new blended regional meetings, holding both-face-to-face and online sessions.

West Midlands Regional Committee

South West

We were grateful to have Andy Smith from The Tax Hive deliver some insightful information relating to tax for our Region on 26 May. On 21 July, we will be welcoming the wonderful Sharan Thind to lead her popular workshop on navigating requests to record assignments.

Joe Rollin

New Members of ASLI

CENTRAL EAST ANGLIA
Paula Fye – Full
Kate Collier – Full
DEVON & CORNWALL
Zoe Mitchell – Associate
EAST MIDLANDS
Sarah Hutchison – Full
ESSEX
Emma Hardy – Full
KENT
Kelly Moore – Associate
Kyle Cluett – Associate
Michelle Parry – Associate
Charlotte Jessup-Smithers – Associate
LONDON
Samuel Calder-Bray – Associate
Tom Simper – Student
Adam Price – Student
Donna Ruane – Full
Rachel Tibbitts – Full
Bonita Hughes – Student
Louise Foley – Associate
M Esther Rodriguez – Student
Craig Bartlett – Full
NORTH EAST
Tallie Manning – Student
Sue Proud – Associate
Alison Spear – Student
Jo Oliver – Associate
Stephanie Raper – Full
NORTHERN IRELAND
Connor McGoldrick – Associate
NORTH WEST
David Wilkinson – Associate
Lauren Feeney – Student
Sarah Jane Etherington – Full
SCOTLAND
Jay Buchan – Student
Emily Norris – Full
SOUTH WEST
Lynn Stewart-Taylor – Student
SUSSEX
Kerry Maughan – Associate
Natasha Rankin – Associate
Andrew Newland – Full
Thomas Hill – Full
THAMES VALLEY
Lesley McGlip – Full
Shirley Farthing – Full
WALES
David Griffin – Associate
Miriam Grimshaw – Student
WEST MIDLANDS
Irum Saleem – Associate

Bias, cut

Max Marchewicz (they/them) reports on repeated misgendering, heteronormative assumptions in BSL and why we're better placed than ever to find the best SLI for an assignment

As an SLI who is also part of the LGBTQ+ community (specifically B, T and Q), it is obvious to me that there is an enormous knowledge gap in the profession about what it means to be LGBTQ+ and regarding issues relating to our experiences.

From interpreting co-workers, I've experienced a wide range of reactions to my being visibly and openly queer, especially the fact that I'm non-binary and trans. Such reactions span acknowledgement and understanding, open confusion, acceptance without understanding, dismissal of my identity's existence, overly personal questions, inappropriate comments and overt transphobia.

Prior to lockdown in 2020, which gave me the opportunity to work in explicitly queer spaces and also with a large number of SLIs I would otherwise never have met, I had never had a co-worker use my correct pronouns. As a trans person, if I've told somebody my pronouns, have them on my lanyard and have corrected them several times, going on to be misgendered repeatedly is a sign of a real lack of understanding or willingness to change their perception of me.

Language access and understanding

If I'm experiencing these reactions from co-workers, I can only imagine the impact such responses have on LGBTQ+ clients. This is especially relevant as there is a general lack of accessible information on gender and sexuality, so deaf clients may not have access to the language they need to express themselves or fully understand their own experiences. For many hearing people, access to information is often the key to understanding themselves and their experiences. For concepts like the asexual spectrum, the aromantic spectrum and non-binary gender identity, this is especially common. It requires a level of understanding to correctly interpret for someone who may lack access to the language they need to fully express themselves, especially as BSL is still lacking standardised signs for a lot of nuanced LGBTQ+ vocabulary.

Moving beyond heteronormative assumptions

There are various types of interpreting assignments specific to the LGBTQ+ community, including social events, arts, drag performance, peer support groups, public consultations, trans or intersex-specific medical appointments, family planning, sexual health and therapy. Still, it is also important to look beyond LGBTQ+ events, as any client (deaf or hearing) at any booking could be part of the LGBTQ+ community and topics like gender and sexuality may come up.

SLIs undertaking LGBTQ+ specific assignments need a basic knowledge of the community, to drop the idea of binary gender and to make appropriate language choices when talking about things like partners or parents. There is a wealth of heteronormative assumptions in society and these should not be perpetuated by the profession, especially in an explicitly LGBTQ+ space. For example, the default assumption is still that every family has a mother and a father, but families come in all shapes and sizes, including families with LGBTQ+ parents. Being sensitive to this when interpreting into BSL while discussing parenting in LGBTQ+ spaces is essential to correctly interpreting the speaker's expressed meaning, as the English word 'parenting' carries no gender or number. This is something to be considered in BSL, as some standardised signs contain heteronormative assumptions and these can be avoided by the SLI to accurately represent the meaning. Outside of explicitly LGBTQ+ spaces, are the signs we use making heteronormative assumptions?

I don't think it is inappropriate for interpreters outside the LGBTQ+ community to take LGBTQ+ specific bookings. It is important for people to recognise when they are a guest in the space of a marginalised community, but in my opinion this does not make interpreting in these spaces something exclusively appropriate for community members. The question of propriety lies in whether the individual interpreter is the right person for the job. I have met LGB interpreters who have no understanding of the trans community and they would not be the right person for many LGBTQ+ events, and trans specific events in particular. I know plenty of interpreters who don't consider themselves LGBTQ+ who are strong allies with a knowledge of vocabulary and community issues and would be appropriate for these bookings.

In an ideal world, the most appropriate interpreter would be booked for any assignment and I feel that we should be recommending appropriate interpreters if we feel the booking is not within our skillset. This could mean accepting an LGBTQ+ booking as a non-community member or it could be passing the booking to someone with more knowledge or context for that particular assignment. Interpreters with prejudices need to consider the ethical implications of continuing an assignment if it becomes clear that LGBTQ+ issues will be discussed. They need to ask themselves whether their bias, conscious or unconscious, will interfere with their ability to complete the assignment ethically.

'I had never had a co-worker use my correct pronouns before lockdown'

Too late to plead unfamiliarity

We're past the time when it's reasonable to plead unfamiliarity. There's a basic level of knowledge that all interpreters need in order to be prepared for encountering LGBTQ+ people in our work, and I don't feel that we have achieved that yet.

There is a strong argument for the establishment of an LGBTQ+ interpreters network. It would provide a single point of contact for deaf LGBTQ+ clients looking for an SLI from a specific section of the community or with specific knowledge; deaf and hearing clients would be sure they are booking an appropriate SLI for LGBTQ+ events and interpreters would have somewhere to signpost clients for co-workers or replacements.

With remote work becoming more normalised, we're better placed than ever to give clients the opportunity to choose the right sign language interpreter, as the right person may be more important to someone than having an interpreter physically in the room.

One more milestone

The recently established Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters is another significant step towards improved access for the deaf community in the Republic of Ireland. **Ray Greene**

When Irish Sign Language was recognised in the Republic of Ireland in December 2017, it represented the much-anticipated promise of improved access for the deaf community. Before this milestone, the lack of sign language recognition and provision had led to systematic exclusion and extreme marginalisation of the deaf community.

ISL is estimated to be used by about 5,000 deaf people and 40,000 people in total, according to the Irish Deaf Society, including those who are related to, in relationships with, or work with deaf people.

The ISL Act 2017, Section 7, states that 'A court or public body, in compliance with its obligations under this Act, shall not engage the services of a person providing Irish Sign Language interpretation unless the person's competence has been verified by having been accredited in accordance with an accreditation scheme funded by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection'.

In 2007, the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) was established to develop and deliver interpreting services to Ireland's deaf community and to service providers, including public services. They also listed interpreters who held recognised qualifications and had experience and expertise.

In March 2017, SLIS published *A Review of Literature and International Practice on National and Voluntary Registers for Sign Language Interpreters.* This was led by Lorraine Leeson, Professor of Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin, and set out recommendations and a skeleton framework for the development of a national voluntary Register, based on international practice and the latest research. The National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) 2017-2021 then tasked SLIS with establishing a Registration and Quality Assurance Scheme.

A quality development officer was hired in 2018 to draw from research and examples of international best practice to inform the Register's establishment. The deaf community, interpreters and other stakeholders in Ireland were consulted on their opinions on the Register. In line with the Act coming into force in December 2020, SLIS established the Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters (RISLI). The first task was to invite interpreters to join the Register. Workshops were held in the weeks before registration to inform interpreters and guide them through the process.

The registration process

Applicants to the Register must have at least one of the recognised qualifications/accreditations identified in the Registration Process Policy. Without such a qualification/accreditation, they go through a different registration process, which can mean completing specific CPD training or a skills check. The application form, supplementary documents and information supplied undergo rigorous checks by legal advisors, resulting in a lengthy process. Registered interpreters do not currently have to pay a fee to be on the Register.

At the time of writing, there are five deaf sign language interpreters and 87 hearing sign language interpreters on the Register. There are currently 24 students participating in a deaf interpreter training programme at the Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin. Students are being prepared to meet the criteria for inclusion the Register.

It is mandatory for sign language interpreters on the Register to engage in CPD and provide evidence of practice. The CPD comprises structured/unstructured and deaf community engagement hours (where applicable). At least five per cent of members will be audited annually.

A registration panel of up to 11 volunteers will maintain the Register. They apply to become panellists, are shortlisted and are then recommended by a selection committee. The panel includes individuals across different stakeholder groups and they assume the role of decision-makers on all matters pertaining to the Register. SLIS provides administrative support.

Policies developed to support the operation of the registration system include a Code of Conduct, GDPR and Privacy Policy and Complaints and Mediation processes. The Code of Conduct is integral to the Register, for both service users and interpreters, and covers professional conduct, confidentiality, impartiality, accountability for professional decisions, working conditions, professional relationships and CPD.

Any person can make a complaint about a registered interpreter who has, in their opinion, breached, or failed to follow, the Code of Conduct. Complaints can be due to poor performance, not having the skills needed, breach of Code of Conduct, not respecting someone's right to make their own decisions, dishonesty or conduct/behaviour issues. Mediation is an option before progressing further. If the complaint is upheld, outcomes can include a formal letter of warning, requirement to complete specific training, mentoring, assessment, suspension or removal from the Register. External assessors will be retained by the Registration Panel to set out practical and knowledge-based assessments of interpreters for specialisation panels, to assess qualifications, and to carry out annual audits of CPD among registered interpreters.

A mentoring programme is being developed to provide experienced RISLI-registered interpreters the chance to train as mentors. The aim is to train experienced interpreters to formally mentor new interpreters, those returning to work after a break or those wishing to progress in their career.

The Register's values include enhancing social inclusion and access for deaf sign language users, improving the quality and availability of interpreters, supporting service providers, particularly public bodies, to facilitate the use of sign language interpreting services and striving to do no harm.

Before the Register's establishment, there were no skills checks, no mandate or incentive to engage in CPD and no mentoring opportunities and ad hoc complaints procedures were operated by different interpreting agencies. There was a list of interpreters who had reached a required standard but this was never re-visited. Those who did not have any formal interpreting qualifications/accreditation could continue to work in public bodies including legal and medical settings.

Now, to work with any public bodies, interpreters must be on the Register. This will have far-reaching consequences, not only for the interpreters who have the opportunity to become more competent practitioners, but also and more importantly for those whom they serve.

For more details see www.risli.ie

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Interpreting faithfully

Vicki Ashmore reports on attending circumcisions as an SLI, ad hoc requests to interpret into Hebrew and why it's time to challenge hatred when we see it

I'd like to tell you about being from an Orthodox Jewish background and my experiences interpreting in Jewish settings. I'd like to share the types of assignments I've taken on, the potential pitfalls you might like to be aware of, should you take on these assignments, and how I've dealt with anti-Semitism while working as an SLI. Finally, I'd like to talk about what I call 'beyond co-working' – working together with an awareness of our own diverse backgrounds.

I'm sure you know the basics of Judaism. Still, you may not know there are many, many types of Jews, from the ultra-Orthodox Haredi to the non-religious, culturally Jewish. Each type of Judaism has different customs, services and ways of celebrating, so an Orthodox Jewish wedding will be very different to a cultural one. Orthodox services are almost completely done in Hebrew (good to know before you decide to accept the assignment!).

'I started interpreting informally, by "helping out" in Jewish settings, in the "You're Jewish, you'll do" kind of way'

My background

I grew up in America in a strict Modern Orthodox Jewish home, though I wouldn't describe myself as Orthodox anymore. I had many careers before I became a SLI and I'm still the Chair of the Education Committee at Bromley Reform Synagogue. I started interpreting informally, by 'helping out' in Jewish settings, in the 'You're Jewish, you'll do' kind of way. In fact, I was first approached to interpret a Jewish funeral when I was still Level 3 (I declined).

Growing up, I was surrounded by people who couldn't hear me but I thought everyone lived that way. When your father, brother and all four grandparents are either mildly or severely hard of hearing, you figure all your friends also face people when speaking, make phone calls when necessary and never, ever bother to call from another room because no one is going to answer. No one in my family was profoundly deaf, so no one knew any sign but my father, a psychologist, used basic ASL with his deaf patients. He taught me my letters and a few sentences (I can still say my name and that I'm eight years old!) and that was that – until I finished my degree in Biology at Columbia University and moved to the UK 25 years ago.

I'd like to say that I got married, had children and then just decided to retrain as an interpreter one day, but my path was a lot more… winding. I did get married and have three children, but one of them had communication difficulties and was later diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum. She inspired me to learn more about different methods of communication, and when I met the person who would become my first deaf friend at the school gates one day, I knew I'd found my purpose in this world.

But back to Judaism: growing up as an Orthodox Jew helped me interpret in Jewish settings because I speak *a bit* of Hebrew. This is because I went to Yeshiva instead of regular school. Most Orthodox Yeshivas offer bilingual education, so I was taught half of my classes in English and the other half in Hebrew from age 4-17. So, although I couldn't and wouldn't interpret from Hebrew directly into BSL professionally, it's still of some use – and you'll see how.

One Jewish setting you might be asked to work in is called a Brit Milah – or circumcision. Do you know the sign for circumcision? One sign is two thumbs, circling around each other. Another, very 'visual' sign, is the left index finger extended, with the right index finger curved like a hook. The 'hook' swipes the top of the index finger off… and if you can imagine what that looks like, you'll know why I wasn't sure I wanted to go to a circumcision either. But I did go. So if you were booked to attend a Brit Milah, you would want to consider how interpreting for such a religious and cultural event might affect you and prepare for that.

Interpreting at a circumcision

For me, those effects started to appear when I was working on my prep. First, I had to put my own feelings aside regarding circumcision because, well, that's what we do as SLIs. Next, I wanted to know the baby's name to be prepared to fingerspell it when he was named in public for the first time at the Brit. I mean, we'd all be fine

'I had to put my own feelings aside regarding circumcision because, well, that's what we do as SLIs'

if his name was David Smith, not so fine if his name was Menachum Shneerson ben Avraham Shtisel HaLevi. But I knew that the parents would not want to give me the name of their new baby boy before the Brit because it's 'bad luck'. And although I asked three times, they never did.

I also knew that I'd be standing behind the 'mechitza', or the wall between the men and the women. The men and baby could be on the other side of the room. I'd be lucky if I could *hear* the baby's name from there and then be able to fingerspell it but at least I identified it as a possible hiccup!

On the day of this Brit Milah, it was a holiday, so the parents would not use electricity or carry a mobile phone as this breaks the rules of the Sabbath and Holidays. The client gave me the name of the synagogue and told me it was on the main road in Golders Green so I left my home in South London with time to find the synagogue. Who knew there could be so many synagogues on one road in Golders Green?! No way to text the client or ring the synagogue because of the holiday… So how did I find the client? I overheard someone on the street mention that they were going to a Brit and I stalked them all the way there!

I managed to get to a synagogue where a Brit was happening, but was it THE Brit? The client was late – fair enough, she had a new baby but there was no way to text her so I'm sitting there panicking. Thank goodness she eventually arrived: Mum, brother, grandma and granddad, all deaf as expected, and – surprise – half a dozen hearing, non-English speaking Israeli family members she

forgot to mention (definitely not expected).

We went in and indeed, the men and baby were across the room. Luckily, I was familiar enough with the Hebrew prayers that I could paraphrase them. I even managed to catch two out of three of the baby's names (I still don't know what the third one was). Still, the service was the easiest part of the assignment, because I was not prepared for *after* it, when I was asked in BSL to interpret directly to Hebrew, which I never told them I would do (they realised I understood the prayers and wanted me to give it a go). 'Don't worry if it's not perfect...'It's not "official interpreting"' they said (whatever *that* means). 'Just ask them if they're hungry, or thirsty, tell them where the toilets are, what the baby's name is and how much he weighed at birth etc.' That day, I prayed more than I had done in a long time….

With my background and lived experience, could I have done this to a professional standard in a church, Hindu temple, mosque or other place of worship? No. That's not to say I wouldn't try if the opportunity presented itself, but at least I'm aware that I'd need the support of a co-worker who had a clue!

Anti-Semitism

According to the website gov.uk, one of the definitions of anti-Semitism is: 'Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demoralising or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective – such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.'

With that in mind, I'd like to tell you a story about how my background and culture have at times worked against me. And I think it's worth exploring how being subjected to anti-Semitism or racism, or even witnessing it while working can affect our interpreting long after the event has passed.

Years ago, before I was a professional interpreter, I volunteered to support a friend's friend with her English homework. The homework had a paragraph about a man in a bank. I don't know how it happened, but the woman started to sign about how she doesn't trust banks because the Jews control them all. And how did she sign 'Jew'? With a hooked nose, just like Hitler used to draw us. I'd only just got used to having the 'beard' sign for all Jewish people (women included), but the hooked nose sign was definitely worse – more witch-like, more Fagin, more sinister. Now, of course she didn't know I was Jewish and at that point I certainly wasn't going to tell her, but I didn't want her to think that way and my feelings were already hurt. So I just signed, 'that's not true' and her answer was, 'It's absolutely true, my husband told me. The Jews control the banks. Also they control the media so we don't know what is really happening in the world. That's why you don't know they have all the money, because they control the media.'

So there I was, a fully grown adult at work, trying not to cry. I had volunteered to help her (unpaid, remember), I gave my time and support, but here she was, accusing me of crimes based on a stereotype that has followed Jews for centuries, no matter who we are or what we do. I finished helping her with her homework as quickly as I could without looking her in the eyes, so I probably did not live up to my own professional standards. I have no idea if she knew I was upset but at that point I no longer cared. In the weeks that passed,

'How did she sign "Jew"? With a hooked nose, just like Hitler used to draw us'

' I knew this woman was a fully grown adult, and that deaf people "know better" the way hearing people do'

I realised that I was still upset about what had happened, so I spoke to our mutual friend. And do you know what she said? 'She's deaf, how is she supposed to know better? You're making too much of it. Just move on.'

But I couldn't move on. Because I knew full well that this woman was a fully grown adult, and that deaf people 'know better' the same way hearing people do – someone *teaches* them better, and holds them accountable. In fact, I decided then that I would never, ever allow comments like those against *anyone* to go unchallenged again. And that if someone told me about a situation like that, I'd support *them,* not excuse the person who'd hurt them.

Beyond co-working

Fast forward another few years. I was working in the reception of a deaf charity for a few hours when one of their service users came in. He started making homophobic comments about a male SLI who wasn't in the room. I started with the STOP IT signs, usually enough to embarrass people into stopping.

But this man just carried on. I said, 'Do not talk about him this way. If you do, I'll get the manager'.

Cue a lot of, 'I didn't mean anything by it' and 'I didn't know he was your friend' (he wasn't, I'd never met him before) and, my personal favourite: 'some of my best friends are gay' – (which for me is right up there with 'All Americans are fat and stupid, except you Vicki, you're different'). Anyway, the man changed the subject. Still, at the end of that day, I felt that it was important that I didn't let it go and told the manager. I found out later that the manager had had complaints about this client before. He invited the client back and explained that, if he made any more homophobic remarks, he could not return. The man has behaved ever since.

These stories all describe my experiences interpreting in Jewish settings, but they also talk about supporting each other as SLIs. Our job is to bridge cultural divides and provide a professional level of service to our customers. But it's not just the cultural divides between hearing and deaf people that need to be considered. If we all worked in the same office and one of our colleagues – hearing or deaf – were subjected to audism, racism, or anti-Semitic or homophobic comments, would we not all rally to their defence?

I think it's important that, as SLIs, we support each other in areas when it's not just an issue of language but of culture. This is also where lived experience can help or hinder, such as whether we can truly prepare to interpret a Jewish circumcision or a Catholic mass or a Muslim wedding on our own. Of course, we want to support our clients with our lexical choices. But we can also support them by being sure we don't cause offence inadvertently, such as by texting on a religious holiday or by wearing inappropriate clothes for the setting. And we can support each other by challenging hatred when we see it, and by 'sticking together', not just as communication professionals but as a part of the wider, wonderful deaf community. Where better to start than here at ASLI?

So I would like to start by making an offer to all of you today. If you need support for preparing for a Jewish service or event, please do come to me, I'm happy to help. And if you are subject to abuse for your race, religion, what you look like or who you love, come to me; I'm happy to help. That's what I call 'bridging cultural divides'.

Cold calling

The GDPR set out to protect deaf BSL users, yet leaves them significantly disadvantaged when contacting banks by phone via third-party professionals. **Megan McArthur** reports

Making a phone call may be a straightforward task for most hearing people, but for BSL users it may prove onerous. UK banking is currently moving from high-street branches to online/telephone services due to technological advancements, efficiency and cost-effectiveness. However, telephone banking services can be inaccessible for BSL users when they try to call banks through interpreters and experience barriers.

Historically, communication technologies such as telephones, radios and televisions have isolated deaf and hard of hearing people and made it harder to access information (Napier et al, 2013). The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into force on 25 May 2018 with the aim of giving EU citizens more control over their personal data. It took nine years from inception to implementation with the European Parliament processing over 4,000 amendment proposals and involving three years of scrutiny from the Council of Europe. Accessibility barriers predated GDPR but, as the telephone is now seen as vital for accessing many public services, I wanted to find out if the new regulation exacerbated accessibility problems, so this was the focus of my 2020 master's thesis.

Participant selection

I held semi-structured interviews and informal discussions with various stakeholders involved in GDPR-compliant banking telephone calls. There were 12 participants:

- ▲ Two bank employees (a manager with 25-plus years of experience and a call handler with one year's experience)
- ▲ Two RSLIs (a designated/platform interpreter and a VRS interpreter/researcher)
- ▲ One deaf business owner, who was also a business bank account holder
- ▲ Seven British deaf community members (all UK bank account holders)

I explored the various barriers BSL users in the UK may face when contacting banks via telephone using SLIs and if/how GDPR may impact this. The levels of knowledge, understanding, attitudes and experience of all participant groups were identified. Findings were grouped into four emerging themes linking to my research hypothesis:

'Historically, communication technologies such as telephones, radios and televisions have isolated deaf and hard of hearing people'

1 Complexity of definition and implementation of GDPR

- ▲ Standardisation of practice
- ▲ Ambiguity of definition – 'consent vs fraud'

2 Strategies used during the phone call

- ▲ Explanation of role
- ▲ Calling on family/friends
- ▲ Additional security checks
- ▲ Escalation to management
- ▲ Using 'ownership' language

3 Participant perception of the benefits and barriers of GDPR

- ▲ Benefits of GDPR
- ▲ Barriers of GDPR

4 Emotional aspect of the transaction

- ▲ Positive
- ▲ Negative

Participant perception of GDPR

The catalyst for GDPR implementation was the 1995 Data Protection Directive's technologically out-of-date status, with its purpose being increased cyber security for all EU citizens. The perceived benefits of GDPR found in my research reinforce this, as participants used language such as 'safety', 'security' and 'protection', mirroring GDPR's language. The main perceived benefit of GDPR was improved security of personal data which may promote feelings of online safety. Some participants, however, saw no benefits of GDPR; it is not universally considered advantageous.

Few participants noted positive aspects of GDPR, although some did reluctantly; most participants felt it created barriers, raising the common themes of restriction and oppression. Feedback included the following: *'It's restricting minority groups' (bank manager). 'It's a fixed system that you have to fit into; the system is not smart enough'* (SLI). The deaf business owner reported: *'There's a lot of barriers…[GDPR] impacts me when banking… impacts my life and also affects my time'.*

'If GDPR is perceived as a system that cannot adapt to meet the needs of its consumers then it may not be fit for purpose'

These quotes show the many ways in which deaf people may be disadvantaged when contacting services via telephone. If GDPR is perceived as a system that cannot adapt to meet the needs of its consumers then it may not be fit for purpose, specifically in a telephone banking capacity. If the system itself is seen as flawed, then everything that follows may be tarnished by association, as shown by the deaf business owner who stated that there are zero benefits of GDPR and that the barriers impact their *entire* life.

Deaf participants expressed their reluctance to use these services. Avoiding a service marketed as fit for all until you desperately need to use it reveals a distrust from a community who would rather go without than have to fight for access or experience repeated rejection.

Ambiguity of definition

Despite the diverse background of participants and expectations of knowledge within professional roles, there was still general uncertainty about defining GDPR. Only the bank manager felt their knowledge was *'quite deep',* while one deaf community member said they *'had no idea what it meant'*. One SLI described GDPR as *'very tricky'.* GDPR's purpose and principles were perceived as perplexing, pointing to lack of clarity within the Regulation. How can

information be relayed or procedures properly implemented if they are convoluted at their core? It could be argued that there are varying degrees of understanding (and confidence) across professions. However, opinions on GDPR from professionals and deaf community members alike, combined with lived experience, provided revealing evidence of GDPR failings:

'Nobody really seems to know or give you any clear answers on any of the areas [GDPR*] covers which is disturbing. I think the government has manifestly failed to explain it properly to people'* – bank manager

'I tried to check but there was no access to information in BSL…I had to ask for support' – deaf business owner.

The government's failure to provide adequate and accessible information was evident and could have led to such variable understanding. While there was some understanding evident in participant terminology, the inconsistency in participants' ability to provide a full explanation of GDPR may impact implementation during banking phone calls with deaf customers.

Standardisation of practice

The standardisation of practice (or lack of) within interpreted phone calls may be due to training, yet it was clear that bank employees had rigorous training programmes in place. The bank employees – spanning different companies – highlighted differences in frequency and structure of training which suggest it is not standardised.

When discussing training focused on deaf customers, the bank employees interviewed stated the deaf community were placed within a *'broader group of vulnerable customers'* and the *'disability part of it…'*. It could therefore be expected that staff are equipped to conduct phone calls – in accordance with GDPR – with deaf customers. All the deaf participants reported interpreted phone calls and/or Next Generation

'Three participants were asked by call-centre employees to use their voice to provide verbal consent'

Text being accepted one day and denied the next, resulting in negative experiences and calling into question the quality of training.

Three participants were asked by call-centre employees to use their voice to provide verbal consent. One participant defined this as *'extremely disrespectful to me and my language choices'.* This request for verbal consent goes against GDPR's definition, which states consent can be given 'by a statement or by a clear affirmative action' (GDPR 2016/679 Art. 4[11]). These experiences highlight a disconnect between the bank employee's training and practice in GDPR implementation, alongside what is arguably a lack of awareness regarding deaf culture, identity and minority language users' rights.

I am aware that a statement of consent can be given in any language regardless of modality, such as BSL. However, I cannot expect or assume that all bank employees are aware of this, which could result in a statement of consent produced in BSL being misconstrued and/or rejected during banking phone calls. These reports of misunderstanding, requests for verbal consent from call handlers and rejections of signed consensual statements highlight the call handlers' perspectives on consent provided in diverse language modalities. They also provide further evidence of barriers to accessibility.

User strategies

Most participants shared strategies they implemented to facilitate smooth telephone transactions while adhering to GDPR. These strategies were used to pre-empt and/or overcome issues that occurred during the interpreted banking phone call.

Explanation of the SLI role

Explaining their role is something all SLIs are familiar with, which is why it is not surprising that this was the go-to strategy among those interviewed. The SLIs explained that interpreters can be *'overt and transparent'* about their role and placed value on clear collaboration with the call handler, meaning simple introductions and explanations of the interpreting process. This strategy, they hoped, would create collaboration and alliance between call handler and SLI, establishing trust and ultimately preventing possible barriers from occurring.

From the SLI perspective, explaining their role promotes awareness, understanding and an important collegial connection between SLI and call handler while providing an opportunity for GDPR-compliant access. Some deaf community members agreed that the explanation was important. However, deaf participants also reported that SLIs taking *'20-30 minutes to explain their role wastes my time'*. Explaining the SLI role can often be seen, from the deaf person's perspective, as an unnecessary time-wasting exercise that their hearing counterparts do not need to endure. Moreover, it is not always effective, as participants reported having to go into bank branches after numerous failed calls due to denial of access.

'Explaining the SLI role can often be seen, from the deaf person's perspective, as an unnecessary time-wasting exercise'

The use of ownership language

Both SLIs mentioned word choice and terminology as a strategy for clearly establishing a relationship between the bank employee and the deaf person, ultimately sharing professional responsibility between bank employee and SLI. Phrases such as 'I've got one of your customers on the phone' and '[let's] work together to deliver a service' were used to promote client ownership. The strategy was a way of aligning with the call handler, shifting the dynamic from confusion or suspicion to collaboration. Ownership language infers that SLI and bank employee need to work together to provide equal access for deaf consumers. This strategy may also strengthen the relationship between communication support service providers who hold contracts with banks and banking call centres. Future research will be required to determine this impact.

Escalating to management

This strategy of escalating to management was deployed by 83% of participants with the prevailing reason that bank managers are perceived to have more experience of calls with deaf customers and more decision-making authority. The strategy can be employed either by the deaf client or the SLI.

SLI participants posited that escalating to management could be due to high staff turnover or low job retention. Therefore, call handlers may lack experience or confidence and trigger the escalation to management themselves.

The aforementioned training inconsistencies might also explain why most of my study's participants had experience of escalating banking phone calls to management. If staff are not trained to appropriately conduct these calls then management (with more knowledge, experience and authority) have to take responsibility. While it is regulation that bank staff must be trained, once an employee has reached an adequate level of

training and experience, they leave. Banks are then chasing their tails training their replacement and the cycle repeats itself.

By transferring the call and seeking authorisation from management, deaf customers are often given access to their account via an SLI, making escalation successful. It is also a strategy that can be understood as common practice if access is denied. This in turn may prompt change when referring to management becomes a regular occurrence.

The emotional aspect

Most of the participants recalled the phone calls negatively, with '*frustrating*' being a term used by most. Phone calls can leave deaf banking customers feeling defeated and undervalued, seeing the process as futile. One SLI reflected: *'You have to say to the deaf person "do you want me to fight this for you?". They'll say yes and just sit there watching in frustration,'* suggesting that deaf customers and SLIs have similar emotional responses to these phone calls.

The deaf business owner revealed additional ways that banks are '*blocking [them] at every avenue*' such as local branches closing, restricted opening hours and the transition to online/telephone services. These highlight patterns of inaccessibility for deaf people, stemming from historical structures that oppressed the deaf community through oralism and audism (Lane, 1992 and Ladd & Lane, 2013). Another finding was that deaf business owners may experience increased stress when contacting the bank. The deaf business owner in my research detailed the pressure, uncertainty, discrimination, oppression and sadness they feel when accessibility issues arise.

Although there were few positive recollections, one example was from the bank employee, who reflected that difficult calls can be transformed through hard work and adaptability. The VRS interpreter explained: *'VRS calls to banks are…one of my favourites…I think the way they receive calls from me and form relationships with me is very good'.* This positive experience could be linked to this SLI working for a VRS company, and may contrast with someone who is 'cold calling' with no organisational backing or authorised line (Dickinson, 2002).

So, what is an authorised line? After contacting multiple organisations, I have been unable to acquire a definitive definition of an authorised line or what contracts between VRS/VRI providers and banking institutions look like in practice, with GDPR cited as the reason for not disclosing this information. This highlights how contentious this regulation can be. However, I propose that this preference from SLIs and subsequent adaptability by call handlers could be linked to having contracts between VRS/VRI service providers and banks, thus reinforcing professionalisation, trust and positive experiences for all involved.

Conclusion and solutions

Deaf customers *can* be discriminated against and oppressed by misconstrued GDPR compliance. They are often significantly disadvantaged, compared to their hearing peers, when contacting banking services by telephone. They are oppressed, isolated and receive unjust treatment by a regulation that aims to protect them.

Furthermore, GDPR's implementation may discriminate against deaf/non-verbal citizens by promoting normative denial of access through ambiguous language in the definition of consent, and by providing little clarity on consent given in minority languages such as BSL. This ambiguity of definition and misconstrued compliance by banking organisations creates further discrimination and oppression of deaf citizens.

'Another finding was that deaf business owners may experience increased stress when contacting the bank'

One way to create equally accessible banking services for *all* consumers could be to adapt training within call centres to focus on specific ways to communicate with deaf banking customers rather than theoretical GDPR rules. The Financial Conduct Authority – with support from relevant deaf organisations – could mass-distribute a 2–5 minute training video on deaf awareness and the interpreting process. This could form a standardised summary of relevant information across all banking societies and call centres in the UK, equipping call handlers with the knowledge to conduct calls with deaf customers professionally, efficiently and to promote accessibility and inclusion during interpreted banking phone calls.

'Inherent tension lies at the core of compliance; long-term resolution lies within GDPR itself'

Another solution could be to conduct extensive structural changes at an institutional level by redesigning banking call-centre software to allow call handlers to see the VRS provider's screen during interpreted calls. This would allow calls to proceed in the context of trust, unity and transparency between all stakeholders, dismantling barriers to accessibility.

A 'quick fix' could be having deaf customers' bank accounts set up to allow RSLIs permission to access personal data while providing communication services for the deaf person and call handler. This could be regulated by the call handler recording the SLI's professional registration number on the call notes so that all stakeholders can be accountable should a contention occur.

However, inherent tension is at the core of compliance, meaning a long-term resolution lies within GDPR itself. Barriers described in this research could be overcome if GDPR adapted its definitions to be reflective of spoken *and* signed languages, with recognition for the variety of modalities used by the citizens it seeks to protect.

This article is an adaptation of Megan McArthur's MA Thesis (2020). For more information please contact meganmcsigns@gmail.com

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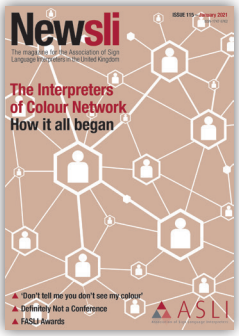

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